



COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO JOINT INFORMATION CENTER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Cyber Safety and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)

San Luis Obispo, CA — The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has created expanded avenues for predators to find new victims. Children and youth are out of classroom settings and spending more time on the internet. These circumstances increase the exposure to predators online through social media and gaming. Cyber safety education is more important than ever for the prevention of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) in the community.

Human traffickers use various online platforms to identify victims. They often pose as a peer close to the same age. The goal is to convince the victim to keep their relationship a secret and agree to an in-person meeting where the victim may be kidnapped or convinced to run away with the trafficker. Online predators will often convince the victim to share explicit photographs of themselves, which the predator will use to manipulate and bully them with threats of further online exposure.

County officials encourage parents and caregivers to have a heightened awareness of the websites children are visiting and the people they are in contact with. Having open, regular dialogue with children is important, as well as setting rules that are clear about the expectations for online behavior.

Good cyber safety ground rules for children include:

- Never giving out personal information, such as addresses or phone numbers.
- Never agreeing to meet someone in person who they have only met online without parent or guardian approval.
- Never posting pictures or videos of themselves or others online that parents or guardians would consider inappropriate.
- Telling parents or another trusted adult right away if someone online makes them feel uncomfortable or pressures them to break the rules.

If you or someone you know needs help regarding human trafficking or CSEC, the following resources are available:

- San Luis Obispo Sheriff's Office: (805) 781-4550
- Polaris U.S. Human Trafficking Hotline: (888) 373-7888
 - Text "Be Free" to 233733
 - Visit polarisproject.org
- 2-1-1 Hotline: Dial 211 or (800) 549-8989

To report acts of child abuse and neglect, contact the Child Welfare Hotline at (805) 781-1700. For more information and resources on cyber safety, please visit ReadySLO.org.

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